

## EDITORIAL

In her remarkable Michael Prior Memorial Lecture “Endgame: Beckett and Genet in the Middle East’ Prof Jacqueline Rose, the distinguished professor of literature at Queen Mary’s College, London University, focused on the Israel–Palestine conflict in terms of the dialogue which was so central both to Edward Said and Michael Prior’s work. Beckett had addressed the silent complicity of those who stood during the Nazi genocide and Genet had done the same after being present in Beirut at the time of the Sabra and Chatilla massacre in 1982.

### **Kairos: the Decisive Time**

Sensitive to past Christian involvement in the persecution of the Jews, Christians have been silent in the face of the ongoing Palestinian tragedy. The Kairos document, published by leading Palestinian Christians last year, calls on Christians worldwide “to stand alongside the oppressed and preserve the word of God as good news for all rather than to turn it into a weapon with which to slay the oppressed” and asks “are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples (Israelis and Palestinians) attain justice, peace, security and love?”

### **The Price of Solidarity**

Such support for the oppressed can be costly. On 31 May this year, reports indicated that 19 people were killed and dozens injured as Israeli commandos stormed the ships, carrying aid, building supplies and toys from Larnaca to Gaza, which were surrounded by Israeli gunships in international waters, over a hundred kilometres off Gaza’s coast. This extraordinary act of piracy against a flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian aid and international activists to Gaza has excited a wave of world wide protest. It is to be hoped that fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible and carefully manipulated Christian guilt will not inhibit Christian voices from sharing the protest—not just over this incident, but over the cruel blockade of Gaza, the continued expropriation of Palestinian land, the separation wall and all the other myriad injustices suffered by the Palestinian people.

### **The Living Stones of Iraq**

In our concern for the situation in Palestine we should not forget the terrible predicament of the Christian living stones in Iraq. In the appeal by Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregorios III (Laham) we are reminded that from 2003 to 2010, about two thousand Christians have been killed in different districts, following successive

waves of violence and that forty per cent of the one million six hundred thousand Iraqi refugees are Christian. Alongside the exodus of Christians from Israel/Palestine this represents the most extreme example of a general trend across the Middle East whereby the Christian Living Stones are leaving.

### **Fraternal Organisations**

Living Stones is only one of a number of Christian organisations in Britain dedicated to raising awareness of this alarming trend and trying to offer friendship and support to beleaguered Christian communities. We already work closely with Bible Lands, the Amos Trust, and Fifth Gospel Retreats and many other charitable organisations serving the same cause. In particular many of our members also belong to Friends of Sabeel, which supports the grassroots ecumenical liberation theology organisation based in Jerusalem and Nazareth. Each of these fraternal organisations has its own inspiration and charism but it is hard to avoid the feeling that much effort is unnecessarily duplicated. As, Colin South suggests more co-operation and even amalgamation may be desirable.

### **In this issue**

This issue of the magazine begins with a setting out of new plans and perspective for Living Stones by our new Chair, Colin South. This article is entitled “Making a Difference—Living Stones and its Plans for the Next Few Years”. In it he refers to our projected pilgrimage for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity planned for January 2011. Our pilgrims will join with the programme of the local churches in Jerusalem during the week and will also provide opportunities for meetings with Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem and the Galilee.

### ***From the Chair***

## **MAKING A DIFFERENCE—LIVING STONES AND ITS PLANS FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS**

*Colin South*

*Colin is now Chair of Living Stones. He served as Director of Friends Schools in Ramallah from 2000-2004 and maintains his interest in the Christian community in Israel/Palestine in membership of several Christian organisations with interests in the region.*

It is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to serve as Chair of Living Stones this year. All officers of the Trust are appointed for a year at the Annual General Meeting. The 2009 AGM was a little unusual as the Meeting recognised a new

position as Honorary President of the Trust. Revd Dr Duncan Macpherson had been nominated by the Executive and the appointment was made. This is a three year appointment and is intended to make use of the post-holder's particular skills in public relations and in the promotion of Trust. Duncan has served the Trust well since its foundation and has been its Chair since the death of Rev. Michael Prior, and we look forward to his service as President.

The Executive Committee has been thinking hard about the future of Living Stones. We are aware of the number of charitable bodies and other non profit organisations whose major concern is the Christian community in the Middle East and in particular Israel/Palestine. Many of these organisations are fraternal bodies in the sense that we support each other and share similar objectives. We run conferences inviting church leaders from the region and from the UK who have a contribution to information and debate within the Christian community in the Middle East, we run pilgrimages and workshops, we host magazines or newsletters and some financial assistance is offered; in the case of Living Stones, we offer student sponsorship to Palestinians within the field of theological studies in relation to the Holy Land and collect money for Christian social projects in the region. It is hoped that by working together with other organisations closely we can help resource each other and, should the occasion arise particularly where our programmes reinforce each other, consider the possibility of union. There is no sense of urgency but we do believe in an ecumenical principle of not doing separately what we can better do together.

As with any organisation, getting it right is a never ending and goal shifting aim as circumstances change...restlessness is the order of the day and that's not such a bad thing. The other interesting and parallel aspect of charity governance is the strong personalities that are inherently part of its energy and development. You might expect this from a value driven organisation with a clear mission and vision to encourage and support the Christian community in the politically and socially turbulent world of the Middle East and you would not be disappointed. The good thing about such a mix of personalities is that there is no shortage of ideas; the challenge is to harness them and make such ideas work towards achieving the charitable aims of the Trust.

This is where the work that the Executive have been doing in the last twelve months or more is important. A strategic plan is emerging which requires longer term financial and programmes planning than we have been currently used to. Essentially, it is hoped to work around a theme which might exhaust itself in a year. In 2010/2011, the theme is Unity and Diversity where we hope to focus on the Jerusalem Churches and in 2011/12, the tentative theme will be Leadership Development. The feature articles of the Magazine, our Conferences and workshops will follow the theme and try to develop it

through the period. It is hoped that we will be able to offer some Bible Study notes which will seek to encourage individual church congregations to explore the theme, thinking around the issues related to the Christian communities of the Middle East in preparation for a regional conference. Where possible, we will work collaboratively with other organisations in the presentation of these conference themes.

Although it is not seen as necessary that the Michael Prior Lecture deliberately follows the theme, we will hope for a continuity of ideas. Professor Jacqueline Rose was our Michael Prior lecturer in 2010. Jacqueline is a Professor of English at Queen Mary's College, University of London. She considered how dialogue can be conducted across a divide and drew on the work of both Michael Prior and Edward Said. Professor Rose spoke to us on Wednesday, May 26th at S. Mary's University College, Twickenham. Rt. Rev. Michael Nazir-Ali will be our lecturer in 2011 and plans are already in place for 2012. Both Professor Rose and the Bishop are individuals who knew Michael Prior and respected him.

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, from 21st January to 1st February, 2011, our pilgrim group will spend time listening to and hopefully appreciating the subtlety of difference and richness of diversity among our church communities. There will be time for reflection and discussion as well as plenty of opportunity for personal time including shopping. **Note the dates in your diary fill in the booking forms in this magazine;** prices will be modest, I promise.

The Living Stones Executive Committee that you elected at the last AGM are excited by these developments and hope that you will share in that enthusiasm. Please let us know how you feel by writing to me at colinsouth@aol.com. We will take into consideration how you respond and any ideas that you might bring to us. The Executive meets every other month beginning in January each year. Please take time out to let us know your thoughts and ideas on the planning process and the themes that we are considering. If you can help host a regional conference, please let us know. We will provide the speakers if you can help us with the venue and the audience.

## **PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

*Jo Simister*

*Jo Simister, one of the trustees of Living Stones, writes about her experience of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Jerusalem in 2010, and gives information about the group pilgrimage in 2011:*

I am sure most readers are familiar with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity<sup>1</sup>, and may even have been involved with events in their locality. For most of us, these will be limited to events shared between Anglican, Free Church and Roman Catholic churches. For example, few of us will have had the opportunity to experience worship with the various orthodox churches.

If you are tempted by a week which typically includes Greek Orthodox Apodeipnon (Compline) in the Anastasis (place of the Resurrection) of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and visits to the Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Catholics and Ethiopian Orthodox, as well as Lutheran churches and a truly ecumenical celebration in the room of the Last Supper, read on!

A few years ago, when I was fairly newly arrived in Jerusalem, a Quaker colleague suggested that I might like to accompany him to some of the different churches during the Week. I hadn't been in the area very long and I wasn't really quite sure what to expect, but I had one of the richest and most fascinating weeks of my decade in Jerusalem, memories of which remain vivid. There is a huge variety of Christian worship expression available in Jerusalem, from the ethereal Russian orthodox liturgy to the more joyous congregational participation of the Copts, Syrians and Ethiopians.

The Week kicked off on **Sunday** with a comfortably familiar inaugural service in the **Anglican** cathedral of St George in Nablus Road, and the chance to sing some lusty hymns in a full church.

On **Monday** we joined the **Armenian Orthodox** in the Cathedral of St James in the Old City Armenian Quarter, just inside Jaffa Gate. The candles on the chandeliers were being lit and the cascades of lamps strung across the church, which is a big cube with a dome on top, decorated with paintings not icons. A reading desk had been put ready with a fully flounced skirt and woolly shawl over it. The service was in several languages, and consisted mostly of readings and music, and a special sung prayer for victims of a recent earthquake. The clergy all stood under the dome where the choir stands on a normal Sunday, blowing out their candles at the end.

On **Tuesday** we went to the **Lutheran** Church of the Redeemer, near the main meat market in the Old City, and sang hymns from a tri-lingual hymn

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1 The **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** is an international Christian ecumenical observance kept annually between 18 January and 25 January. It is actually an octave, that is, an observance lasting eight days. It began in 1908 as the **Octave of Christian Unity**, and focused on prayer for church unity, but emphasis shifted to advocate prayer "for the unity of the Church as Christ wills it, and in accordance with the means he wills", thereby enabling Christians with differing views of the Petrine ministry to join in the prayer. The week begins on the Feast of the Confession of Peter, on 18 January, and concludes with the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul on 25 January. (However, in the Southern Hemisphere, where January is a vacation time, churches often find other days to celebrate the week of prayer, for example around Pentecost, which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the church.)

book with the music written backwards at the back. I was struck by a couple of telling phrases in the translations of otherwise familiar prayers, and we noticed the avoidance of the ‘filoque’ in the Creed—this caused us to speculate on who had to make what compromises in order to participate in the Week!

A more familiar format for **Wednesday**: a beautifully sung service in Arabic and seven European languages and Latin, led by Franciscan fathers, with lots of plainsong, at St Saviour’s RC (here called **Latin**) church in the St Francis Road just inside New Gate.

On **Thursday** the service started slightly earlier, in the Cenacle on Mount Sion in the Jewish Quarter, which is believed to be the room of the Last Supper. This service was simple, with the students from the nearby Dormition Abbey playing recorder and cello, and giving thoughts on the readings which were read in Hebrew and other languages. Various clergy read prayers for various concerns with a sung kyrie response. After the main service we filed up the steps into another room, plain and domed, furnished only with two candles in the middle. As many of us as possible (100?150?) squashed in for a few minutes of silence before all saying the Lord’s Prayer in our own languages—this echoed and bubbled round the room though we all spoke softly—truly the whole effect being vastly more than the sum of its parts. This is the room believed to be where the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, and it is only opened on this one occasion in the year—an interesting choice symbolising the Unity of Christians rather than their disunity as would be the case if it was used for the different denominations to celebrate the various Easters and Pentecosts, which are not always on the same date and seldom coincide with the Jewish Passovers and Pentecosts.

Our **Friday** destination was the **Ethiopian Orthodox** Church off Prophet’s Street in West Jerusalem, which took some finding in pouring rain. The church is circular with a central Holy of Holies which leaves only about one third of the area around the edge partitioned off for the congregation. It’s possible to walk the whole circle, with its delicately coloured walls and beautiful floral and line patterns. It was light when we entered, so it was possible to see the painted blue with stars and cherubim of the dome, a lantern in the centre and the sky showing through the window in a sickle moon shape. The service was a melodious muttering, with some singing by a group of young people, very beautiful and quite African. I later encountered the Ethiopian Christians in Holy Week. They always seem to be full of joy; dancing and drumming form an important part of their celebrations.

On **Saturday** we went to hear Vespers and Matins at St Alexander’s **Russian Orthodox** Church in the Russian Compound, the Moskoviyye outside the Old City walls, better known by us for the detention centre where

many Palestinians we knew had first been detained. The chapel is a squared round, with a huge domed ceiling and small corners, so that it is only just a cross shape. It has delicate paintings over the walls/ceiling and some icons. The nuns' singing was absolutely exquisite and we all stood round in a circle, feeling part of the prayerfulness although it was all in Russian. The liturgy rippled on and on like a stream, with occasional interpolations from the very young priest. There was some business with candles and incense and lights going off and on, I thought to mark the end of Shabbat at sundown (Saturday, the Sabbath—as this was the Israeli side of the Green Line) and the beginning of Sunday.

And finally, back to **Sunday** and the Old City for a **Syrian Catholic** liturgy, with priest in pale pink cope and a choir who sang the Arabic music in what seems a typically Arab constricted throat manner, and then to the **Melkites (Greek Catholics)** in their Cathedral near Jaffa Gate, for a service of Byzantine vespers—loud lusty singing, lots of clergy, lots of incense, lots and lots of bread at the end to dip in a huge chalice of wine—great fun, and a very beautiful church which later became one of my favourite indigenous churches to show to visitors. Over the years I have watched the progress of the frescoes gradually being labelled in Arabic as well as the more usual Greek.

As is probably apparent from the foregoing, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity gives us an opportunity to witness and worship with Christians on both sides of the Green Line, i.e. Palestinian and Israeli Christians, as well as those from other communities who have made their home in the region for mission or work or other reasons.

### **Christians in Palestine**

Because every denomination has wished to have a toe-hold in the land of Jesus' birth and ministry, the church in Jerusalem has become a living image of the diversity and richness of the many Christian traditions in East and West. Unfortunately of course, it is also a reflection of their historical divisions. It is poignant to participate in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the place where Jesus prayed "that they all may be one" (Jn 17:21), where he died "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52), and where the first Pentecost took place.

It is very difficult to get up to date figures on the Palestinian Christians, but it is generally recognised that numbers are dwindling alarmingly due to emigration, which is leading to an aging of the Christian population left behind, and a diminishing skills base.

At present there are more than a dozen churches in Jerusalem with an episcopal ministry: the Greek Orthodox Church, the Latin (Catholic) Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic

Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox and the Russian Moscow Mission churches, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church, the Maronite (Catholic) Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Chaldean (Catholic) Church, the Episcopal or Anglican church, and the Lutheran Evangelical Church. Alongside these, a considerable number of other churches or communities are present in Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Presbyterian, Reformed, Baptist, Evangelical, Anglican, Pentecostal, etc. All together the Christians in the Holy Land, West of Jordan River, number between 150,000 and 200,000, constituting between 1 and 2% of the total population.<sup>2</sup>

Many of these churches are largely made up of Palestinians, but there are often services in other languages reflecting the needs of the 'sojourners', because we should also remember that many Christians in Palestine are not indigenous, but happen to be working and living there. I noticed on the Holy Land Network site (see footnote 3) that services are offered in Arabic, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hebrew, Korean, Romanian, Russian, Swedish, Spanish.... and somehow Italian and some other languages have been omitted!

Here are some interesting facts about the Christian population:

According to the census data collected by the Ottoman Empire, the Christian population in 1914 was 24% of the modern-day area consisting of Israel/Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey; today it is no more than 5%.

### Christians in Israel

In Israel itself, within the 1948 borders, 2.1% of the population is Christian and they comprise 8.3% of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship.

The majority of Palestinian Christians live outside Palestine, in a diaspora of about 5m Palestinians in total (of all faiths). Christians make up 6% of Palestinians worldwide. Christians in the West Bank migrate because of the bad economic conditions (employment is the number one reason) caused by continued political turmoil of Occupation, the Separation Wall, internal political strife and other destabilising factors.

Christian migration out of Israel is much less, due primarily to their *relatively* good overall economic conditions and the *relatively* stable political situation; also the educational system for Arabs in Israel gives limited opportunity for the

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2 Source: principally the Jerusalem Inter-church Centre, 'Ecumenical life in Jerusalem', posted on Facebook 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Jerusalem-Inter-church-Centre/311176290191#/> and <http://www.holylandnetwork.com/jerusalem/churches.htm>; <http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/cic/> gives details of the different services and locations.

acquisition of foreign languages, which would facilitate migration; additionally they have been more severely affected by restrictions on migration imposed by the Israeli government.

If you would like to find out more, these are the web links I usually recommend:

[www.passia.org/](http://www.passia.org/); [www.sabeel.org/](http://www.sabeel.org/); [www.saintgeorgetaybeh.org/](http://www.saintgeorgetaybeh.org/); [www.caabu.org/](http://www.caabu.org/); [www.rediscoveringpalestine.org.uk/](http://www.rediscoveringpalestine.org.uk/); [www.elijahtrust.org/](http://www.elijahtrust.org/); [www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/](http://www.livingstonesonline.org.uk/); and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian\\_Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Christian) and for the wider Middle East : <http://www.oikoumene.org/gr/>.

**THE LIVING STONES PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM  
FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY,  
JANUARY 2011**

Group leaders: President of Living Stones Deacon Duncan Macpherson and Ms Jo Simister

Our **itinerary** will include worshiping with the various Christian denominations of Jerusalem and the West Bank, (Greek Catholic, Syrian, Ethiopian Orthodox, Armenian and many more, plus the more familiar Anglican, Lutheran, Quaker and Roman Catholic churches).

We will also **visit** centres of education and welfare, a brewery and other Christian-led businesses, and meet with eminent Palestinian Christian clergy and community leaders.

There will be **free time** with opportunities for exploring and shopping, joining a local walking tour, participating in the Stations of the Cross, or simply soaking up the experience of the Holy Land.

The **dates** will be Friday 21st Wednesday 2nd February (The Week of Prayer is Sunday 23rd January to Sunday 30th January in 2011) for the full tour which includes a night in Bethlehem, nine nights in Jerusalem, and two in Nazareth. There is also an option to book for Jerusalem only.

We anticipate that most people will want to take advantage of **travelling together** in a group. However, individuals are welcome to make their own arrangements for travel if they wish.

We have chosen **accommodation** on a half-board basis in St Vincent's Hospice in Bethlehem, the Gloria Hotel in Jerusalem, and St Margaret's Anglican Hostel in Nazareth. These are simple and comfortable guest houses and hotels.

Most rooms will be shared twins, but it may be possible to arrange single rooms for a supplement (\$540 for the full tour, \$480 for Jerusalem only).

Some lunches will be taken in the course of the programme, as indicated in the programme available on request.

Cost of full tour only (Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Nazareth): \$1,650

Cost of flight for full tour: tbc—e.g. currently BA £518, EasyJet £170

Cost for Jerusalem only: \$1,400

Deposit for full tour or Jerusalem only: £100 in either case

Deposit for full tour and flight: £200

**Deadline for tour and accommodation only:**

**31<sup>st</sup> October 2010.**

**Deadline for full tour and flight:**

**30<sup>th</sup> June 2010.**

Please **register interest** as soon as possible, either using the enclosed form or contacting

Living Stones c/o the Arab British Centre, 1 Gough Square, London EC4A 3DE and asking for further details, or emailing [josimister@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:josimister@yahoo.co.uk).

## FROM THE DIASPORA

Suha Shakkour a Palestinian Christian student who addressed our AGM in 2007. She has now obtained her Ph.D.

*Can you tell us something about your experience of being a Christian living in the Holy Land?*

I was born in Nazareth, and I have lived in Sakhnin and Jerusalem. What I remember best about the Christian Palestinian communities to which I belonged was the way they functioned as a large extended family. Any member could be relied upon in times of trouble, and during celebrations, they would all share in our joy. My most vivid memory is of the Easter celebrations in Sakhnin which really are a family affair. All the eggs would be dyed on Holy Saturday, and on Sunday morning we children would take our share of the eggs and go to visit our neighbours for egg cracking competitions (one egg is hit against

the other, the ultimate winner is the one who has the last remaining egg intact). We would move from house to house collecting more children and eggs as we went. We played this game with both children and adults—even our priest would participate after Easter Mass!

*What were the particular privileges and problems of the church you belonged to in the Holy Land, and were there any ways in which they may have been different from those of other church traditions?*

The main privilege of the Greek Catholic church my family belonged to in Sakhnin was that it really served as the centre of the community. It was the natural meeting place for members of all ages and consequently played a vital role in the wellbeing of the community as a whole. This was largely due to efforts of our parish priest who, much like the Greek Orthodox priest in Sakhnin, was present during our day to day lives. He acted as a father to our community—visiting the ill, defusing conflict, and joining in our celebrations—and consequently we treated him as one of the family. The main problem the church faced is similar to that of the other churches. Over time, church attendance has decreased and events that used to be celebrated in the church are now celebrated in a home or a hall. This, combined with higher rates of emigration (both internal and international) has led to a much smaller and less closely knit Christian community in both cities and towns.

*What memories do you or any member of your family have of the events leading up to the loss of Palestine in 1948?*

Neither I nor my parents were born by 1948. However, my grandfather along with other young boys and men (both Christian and Muslim) from Sakhnin were rounded up by members of the Hagana. This had also been taking place in other villages around Palestine; in 'Elaboon for example, 29 young men and boys were gathered from their homes and shot in the streets. In Sakhnin, however, the Greek Catholic Archbishop intervened on the men's behalf, and their lives were spared. Very soon after this, my father's family left for Lebanon where they remained for several months, but shortly before the borders closed, they decided to return to Sakhnin.

My family migrated from Lebanon to Canada in 1996 primarily for a more peaceful life. This was a natural choice for us since my siblings and I had been attending an American school in Jerusalem, so we spoke English well and were familiar with the North American education system. Since then, I have moved to Scotland to pursue my PhD. Although I have not lived in Palestine for many years, I hope eventually to return.

*Could you tell us briefly something about your studies and academic work in the UK?*

I have recently completed my PhD (University of St Andrews) which focused on the lives of Christian Palestinians residing in London. As members of a very small minority, Christian Palestinians are often overlooked by the media and the academic community. This occurs despite the fact that 6% of the overall Palestinian population is Christian, among whom 50 to 60,000 were displaced in 1948. While this is changing to some extent for Christian Palestinians in the Middle East, there is scant literature that considers their lives in the 'West' and almost none on their experiences in Britain. My thesis considers how Christian Palestinians have adapted to life in London, and focuses on their English language abilities, educational achievements, attitudes to intermarriage, and their sense of belonging, as well as how their status as Christians has affected their sense of identity.

*How do you maintain your sense of Palestinian identity living in Britain?*

I have lived in a very small town in Scotland for nearly four years where I am one of only two Palestinians. Fortunately, she and I have become very close friends and together we take turns hosting Palestinian dinners and introducing our friends to Palestinian customs, music, art, and food. In addition to this, the nature of my thesis allowed me not only to read widely about Palestine and attend conferences which focused on Palestine or the Middle East, but also to meet many Palestinians who were kind enough to allow me to interview them for my work. Although it is not quite the same as being back home, it has been a comfort to find that Palestinians, regardless of how few they are in a town or city, always manage to create a small community wherever they go.

*How do you see the situation for the Christian communities in the Holy Land and what role can they play in bringing about a better future?*

Being a minority in any nation is difficult; in the Holy Land this is exacerbated by the ongoing political conflict and economic restrictions faced by all Palestinians. Many Christian Palestinians have responded to this growing insecurity by emigrating. As a result, the population has dwindled and estimates now suggest that they comprise a mere 2% of all Palestinians living in the Holy Land; this is in contrast to the 1920s where they made up nearly 10% of the population. One of the challenges faced by all Palestinians is their negative stereotyping in the Western media which brands them as 'terrorists' or 'fanatics', making it difficult for many on the outside to see the human side of the Palestinian people. There is also tendency to homogenize the Palestinian population as

comprising only Muslims. Despite their numbers, Christian Palestinians in the Holy Land nevertheless have an important role to play in the peace process. As Christian Palestinians tend to have ties to Western Christians, it is important that they take advantage of these connections and elucidate the great diversity that exists within the Palestinian population.

*Tell us something about any work you do for the Palestinian cause and for the cause of the Christian Community there and elsewhere in the Holy Land?*

My efforts and support for the Palestinian cause and Christian Palestinian community are largely related to my academic work, and I hope to be able to continue to pursue this line of research on a wider scale. Although a large part of the Palestinian population is now scattered throughout the world, I hope that my work will be of use to the wider Palestinian community, even if only as a reminder of our common Palestinian identity and the need to maintain our unity even in exile.

*What are the prospects for peace in the Middle East?*

Throughout the negotiation process there have been varying levels of resistance to making concessions on both sides. In order to arrive at a reasonable agreement, however, both the Palestinians and the Israelis must consider the larger picture and be willing to make compromises accordingly. One of the primary issues today is the continued presence of Israel in the West Bank; with this kind of oppression, not to mention the imposed economic blockades and restrictions on movement, peace is impossible. As Israeli academic Avishai Margalit put it, the key issue is one of decency, understood as the absence of humiliation. Humiliation, such as that endured by the people of Gaza and the West Bank, but also by the relatively fortunate Israeli Arabs, breeds resentment and, in many cases, violence.

If, however, Israel were to withdraw from the West Bank and give the Palestinians the opportunity to form their own independent state, then we can begin to move forward. Although this will not make up for 60 years of exile, it will allow the Palestinians a chance at feeling they too have someplace to which they belong. Most importantly, however, it will give Palestinians who have been residing in refugee camps for nearly 60 years the opportunity to return or, at the very least, afford them the rights of citizenship with which they can travel and seek permanent employment in other nations.

Finally, to take a somewhat more abstract look at the resolution of the conflict in Palestine/Israel, we can consider it through the lens of the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory, introduced by American political philosopher John

Rawls. In ideal theory, we assume that the relevant agents will comply fully with our preferred solution to any social and political problems. In this scenario, then, I would envisage a one-state, liberal-democratic and multicultural solution. Ideal theory, however, is more of a guide for thought rather than for political action. Thus, it is necessary to move on to non-ideal theory where we naturally must take into account the many constraints inherent in any conflict resolution. In this case, it may be necessary to adopt the more realistic goal of a two-state solution, perhaps with a special UN-sanctioned status for Jerusalem.

**IN CONVERSATION WITH DR AHMED YOUNIS ABOUT  
HIS VISIT TO THE GAZA STRIP IN DECEMBER 2009**

*Dr Lesley Dawson*

*Lesley is one of the newest of Living Stones trustees. In 1988 she was appointed by Save the Children Fund to lead a degree-level programme in Physiotherapy with Bethlehem University, to produce highly qualified professional staff capable of leading rehabilitation in the field, in the wake of the massive rise of injuries in the Occupied Territories resulting from the first Intifada.*

*Ahmed was one of the Palestinian members of the team, and eventually took over as Director of the programme in 1994. He was born in Rafah in the Gaza Strip and his family is still based there. He is currently the Deputy Head of the School of Physiotherapy at St George's University of London. He is also a member of the Arab Jewish Forum, a lobby group meeting in the House of Lords.*

**Ahmed, you've just been to Gaza after a five year absence. What was your first impression?**

Watching the media here you have a picture that life is full of closures and siege. But you notice no blockades; life is going on, though there is shortage of essential goods. But you can feel the people are really divided. There are those who believe in Hamas and their rule and they think this government are achieving much, though their lives are not improved.

But for the Fatah supporters, it is very difficult. One day we went to say goodbye to a friend who has cancer and was going into hospital. The next day was New Year's day, coincidentally the anniversary of the foundation of the PLO, and there was real fear among these people that Hamas would come to collect them to be put in prison for a few days. Later, I saw official Hamas cars calling at these houses to round up the Fatah supporters on the eve of their celebration. These people are mainly doctors and so on, many with no particular allegiance. But there is an attitude of 'if you are not with us you are against us'.

**You and I, being involved in higher education and university work, should perhaps talk about life for university students and tutors in Gaza?**

There are two universities, next to each other: Al Azhar, identified with Fatah, and the Islamic University, which is Hamas, with different celebrations and strikes. I felt a lack of interest in learning for its own sake, in contrast with the commitment of our students during the first Intifada. Education is just seen as a means of passing or failing. You feel that they are just memorising. When I saw the list of questions one of my nephews had answered, I asked what he thought about them and how that knowledge was going to impact on his future work, and he didn't know what I was taking about. Even talking with lecturers, it's clear they do not know how to go beyond memorizing and understanding. So it's not only the students who don't know what to do with the theory they are gaining during their four years, it is also the lecturers. There used to be contact with our professional bodies and other universities around the world. This doesn't exist at all, now. There seems to be no contact with academics worldwide now.

**And from the smaller children, what impression did you gain about school education?**

When you ask what they did today and what did they learn, they say maths or whatever, but they don't understand why you ask this and why you don't ask about grades? So maths is about gaining 99 or 100%, it is not about how you can apply maths in your daily life or benefit society.

And there are constant rumours. While we were there, there was the swine flu rumour, so mothers kept the children at home. It's clear that firstly no-one challenged the truth of the rumour, and secondly that they value the content of the education so little they do not fight to go—you can easily catch up rote learning. There seems to be no sanction if a child does not go, whereas in the past the parents used to be called in immediately. The teachers are demoralised too—you can tell they are thinking, well, you will all leave school and you will graduate; so what, where are you going to go? The most depressing thing is the lack of progression, the absence of any discussion of what education is about.

**Being physiotherapists we are both interested in health care as well—would you like to comment on what you saw about provision, access, and so on?**

In the UN clinics doctors can find themselves in front of 200–300 patients in a day, and they might only have three types of drugs available: some kind of antibiotic, one cough medicine, and paracetamol for everything else. In the private hospitals such as the Al-Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza and the one UN hospital, their staff are often foreign and short-term and turnover is high, also they suffer acute shortages of resources. As for the government hospitals,

some days they will have everything they need, some days nothing. Most basic surgical equipment and medications come from Ramallah through the Erez crossing point, and a little from Egypt. When a consignment comes, there is no logical thinking about where it should go and how it should be stored, and this lack of management is reflected at every level: in the hospital, the school, the street, the home. But physiotherapy goes on regardless, as it doesn't need much equipment or medication—so some of our graduates are able to continue working well and are widely known.

**All this must be having an effect on family and community relationships?**

Definitely. Any discussion about any subject will be brought down to Hamas says this and Fatah says that, and it will end with—literally—a fight. So a society that was formerly strong enough to stand against anything is now fragmented and fighting against itself.

There are some community elders who are trying to get over this. Traditionally, after the resolution of family disputes, the decision was recorded in the court and it must be carried through—this is the way it worked up till Hamas' time. Now, the first question they will have to ask, if a person known to be Hamas is involved, is 'was he in uniform or not?' Why should this make any difference? Because if he is in uniform, this becomes government action and he cannot be held to account. So questions of death, compensation for injury, damage to property, all these cannot be sorted out—Hamas will say it is not the business of the community leaders. So again, the traditional structure of this community, which was always very tight-knit and cohesive, is being broken down.

Socially, politically, and religiously, Hamas holds the upper hand. If you do not belong to them, you cannot, for example, give the Friday speech in the mosque. They cannot cope with any criticisms or tolerate an alternative viewpoint.

**The Christian community is a very small minority in Gaza—did you hear about how they were faring?**

Our Christian friends in Gaza would always come to my father—even though he is an Imam and they are Christian—to solve any problem, because the community was knit together and as a Muslim majority it is our religious duty to protect the minority. This is unlikely to happen now. Hamas have set up their government system and a parallel system of community leaders, so that cohesion is lost. But within that, there are some who think they can rule by *fowdah*—that is, by force, by the strength of the gun in their hand. At the point when Hamas took control after the election, a small group of ignorant extremists murdered Ramy Awwad, the Christian bookseller. This was devastating for the whole community, as for hundreds of years we had always had good relations between Muslims and Christians. Thank God, the Hamas leadership stamped on this

very quickly, because they are aware of their duty to protect these people. It is very damaging for them, as well as for society in general, to have Christians—or anyone else—being murdered, or even threatened, by such groups. But it isn't only the Christians—Muslims are also being murdered by these *fowdah* groups.

**And have these people damaged Christian people's homes, or the churches?**

Yes they did damage church buildings, again during the transition from Fatah to Hamas, and the Prime Minister himself went to the church to apologise, and brought the priest to his home to show that good relationships were to be maintained.

**But in theory, the Hamas government are protecting the Christian community?**

Yes, but has the message got through to these people? Are they really well educated enough to hold a gun in their hand? Are they really trained properly? Are they loyal? Can they obey orders? It looks as if there are many who hold the power in their guns but do not listen or want to listen to their superiors.

**Now we know that being cooped up inside the home has affected relationships between husbands and wives and fathers and children in the past—did you hear anything like that happening now?**

Unfortunately yes, but not as a result of curfews this time. Now it is the lack of job opportunities, and there are people that really cannot get their basic food, who will sleep without eating. So in desperation the men will go to work in the tunnels, and you know the risks there are enormous, from collapse or destruction by bombing. It also carries a stigma, but it is currently a way of making a lot of money, and it attracts all sorts of people—Egyptians, Sudanese, not just local people.

**People here know something about these tunnels—how necessary to the Palestinians do you think they are?**

I think we have to look at what they bring. For a while after the Israelis left, they were used to bring essentials: flour, oil, etc, and during that time everyone, including the Egyptian Government, accepted that this was how the people were being enabled to survive. However, in the last two years it has become a trading route and now Egypt has a plan to block the whole border by a steel barricade. This seems at first sight to be a most “unhumanitarian” response, because we have all heard from the media how the area is under siege and that there is a severe lack of essentials, medicines, and so on.

I was shocked to find that they are being used to bring in the most inessential rubbish—crisps, chocolate, coca-cola, mobile phones; currently it seems the

only positive thing they are being used for is bringing the fuel for cooking, heating and cars.

However, a very disturbing development is the importing of drugs, and also the passage of drugs brought in from Lebanon and through to Egypt. There is also some trafficking of women, brought in from poor Egyptian families to be married but actually sold as ‘servants’. And there is reverse smuggling of explosives out of Gaza to Egypt. These are the reasons Egypt is considering this blockage. The essential supplies can get through legally, though in short supply—the needs of 1.5 million people are not easily supplied, but what is being brought through the tunnels is mainly illegal or unnecessary.

**I know a lot of western governments have found it very difficult to know how to assist Israel and Palestine in pressing towards a solution of the conflict. As a Gazan living outside Gaza, what would be your message to western governments about Gaza?**

There is a great need for a settlement for Gaza, but for Palestine and Israel as well. These western governments have managed to find a settlement for other very difficult conflicts worldwide, and I feel they do not put enough pressure on both sides—not just Israel—to talk through to a solution. This cannot be a solution which will completely satisfy both sides, so the expectations have to be brought down and there has to be a compromise.

And as Gazan seeing the situation there now, I believe a bit more pressure needs to be brought from the Israeli side to make Gaza a safe and open place where people can come and go, with support from Arab communities and well as European governments.

Unless this happens, I see no light at the end of the tunnel.

**Thank you, Ahmed.**

## A MOMENT OF TRUTH

*‘I wish to affirm that my preaching is not political. It naturally touches on the political—And it touches the people’s real lives—But it does so in order to illuminate those realities and to tell people what it is that God wants and what it is that He does not want.’*

Oscar Romero, 21 January 1979

Such is the title of the Kairos Palestine document, published in Bethlehem on 11 December 2009 by the Christian people of the Holy Land, the Palestinian

people, and supported by the hierarchies of the majority of the Christian churches represented in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

*Kairos*, a Greek word meaning the opportune or supreme moment for something special to happen, says more about opportunity than about time. Further it speaks of opportunity to be grasped.

Why now? Consider the factors influencing the heartfelt cry for Christian witness and for help in ending the suffering of the people of the Holy Land. The realities of occupation, having reached their nadir, together with the sense of isolation of those who endure them, render this the *kairos*. The entrenchment of occupation has occurred under the smokescreen of the peace process.

Those realities are difficult and incomprehensible for us in a free society. Serial maps of the Occupied Territories reveal more than a casual erosion of Palestinian land. Since 1948 there is a corresponding enlargement of what we know as Israel. With the expropriation of land goes the taking of vital water resources. It is no coincidence that the Israeli presence in the West Bank is firmly over the aquifers.

We, unlike Palestinians, are not distinguished by our race or by where we live, by assorted ID cards issued by Israeli military authorities. Freedom of movement for work, business or the demands of normal family life is governed by military closures, countless checkpoints, and the invariable humiliation endured at every opportunity that these encounters present. This 'matrix of control' has endured since 1967, and is reinforced by 'facts on the ground'.

The Separation Wall, yet to be completed, is almost double the length of the 1949 Armistice (Green) line, and in Bethlehem particularly, it is a bold pre-fabricated 20 feet-high concrete structure, interposed between Palestinian and Israeli, and between Palestinian and Palestinian. Division, along with the establishment of settlements means a further taking of Palestinian land, lack of access to schools, clinics, hospitals, fields, and places of work. Journeys of a few minutes now take hours, running the gauntlet of checkpoints and road closures. Division can never be a way of building peace.

Israeli Jewish settlement building, illegal under international law, has continued unabated since the 1967 war, in which the West Bank and Gaza came under Israeli occupation. Almost half a million settlers now live in the West Bank in satellite townships, linked by special roads, prohibited to Palestinians. The settlements, invariably on the 'high places', are strategically placed around centres of Palestinian population, stifling growth, and dividing the West Bank into three cantons. The Separation Wall, built as it is, cuts deep into Palestinian territory in order to place the Settlements on the 'Israeli side' of the wall, hence its formidable length. Together settlements and wall make the establishment of a viable Palestinian state impossible. It is difficult to explain these Israeli 'facts on

the ground' in security terms.

We do not endure laws that arbitrarily determine our choice of spouse by where we live. With such applied ingenuity, slowly but surely the morale of Palestinian people is reduced, and their number in Jerusalem diminished. Jerusalem is to be the undivided eternal Israeli capital.

A new order introduced in April 2010, redefines the term 'infiltrator' to include Gaza residents who have moved to the West Bank, spouses of West Bank residents who hold visitor permits, and foreign nationals. Further control is exercised by fear.

Despite the burden of occupation, 'A Moment of Truth' is a prayerful document, carefully thought out. Its purpose and destination are clear. It is founded on shared Christian faith, exudes hope in a just solution to suffering, and trust in God's mercy and guidance. Christians are asked to repent for their shortcomings in peacemaking. Kairos Palestine 2009 is addressed to the Palestinian faithful, the Israeli and Palestinian leadership, the international community, and most significantly the Churches of the world. It declares Christian forgiveness for the oppressor.

The Christian duty of those under oppression to resist evil is emphasised, and non-violent ways of resistance for Palestinian people are explored. Violence is to be avoided, as evil is not to be repaid with evil.

The Israeli leadership is invited to change its policy and accept the offer of co-operation and reconciliation. The international community is invited to abandon 'double standards', to exercise boycott, divestment and sanctions, all 'tools of non violence for justice, peace and security for all'.

Accordingly, we too are invited to adopt similar strategies as our response to occupation. There has been a growing movement among churches and academic institutions to dissociate from Israel, as long as it remains as occupier.

We are reminded too, of Kairos South Africa 1985, when the Christian churches of South Africa identified and invited the selfsame methods as the way to end Apartheid. This became a turning point for those under oppression. Special attention is paid to the Churches who are asked to abandon theologies that use the Bible to justify 'unjust political options' and to speak out 'with regard to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land ...'

'Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help two peoples attain justice, peace, security, and love?' remains the unanswered question.

*David Toorava  
May 2010*